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**LEARNING TO EXCHANGE TIME:  
BENEFITS AND OBSTACLES TO TIME BANKING**

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**ABSTRACT**

Findings from a qualitative study of Time Bank members from the first Time Bank in New Zealand are reported. Using focus groups, this study identifies benefits of Time Banking in terms of physical, human, social, and cultural capital. Unlike previous research, this study explores Time Banking in a relatively affluent community thus allowing us to understand why those from other populations may participate in Time Banking. This study also identifies a range of obstacles that may prevent individuals from fully utilising Time Banking and may hinder the full development of individual Time Banks. Finally, a number of recommendations for practitioners are discussed.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Time Banks were designed in the 1980's by Edgar Cahn (2000) as a mechanism to rebuild social networks and informal neighbourhood support. A Time Bank is a form of community currency that rewards informal volunteering by paying one 'hour' for each hour of commitment, which can at any time be 'cashed in' by requesting an hour of work in return from the system (Williams, 2004). Since their development, time banks have experienced a phenomenal level of growth. Time banks now exist in twenty-two countries across six continents (Time Banks USA, 2010).

Although time banks are a thriving form of community currency (Collom, 2005; North, 2003; Seyfang, 2002), the practice of time banking has not been thoroughly researched. Past researchers have found that Time Banks are an effective tool for increasing social interaction and creating social networks (Boyle et. al, 2006; Seyfang and Smith, 2002). Seyfang (2003) found that although participants valued the social support provided by their Time Bank, a 'skills gap' prevented many desired exchanges. Collom (2007) found that Time Bank participants joined to expand their purchasing power and for values-based reasons, such as to help others. Finally Seyfang (2004a) found that a psychological barrier can make it difficult for some participants to fully understand the concept of Time Banking.

As the majority of research to date has examined participants in socially excluded groups (Seyfang, 2003) or low income communities (Collom, 2007), a deeper understanding is needed of why those from other groups may participate in Time Banking. In addition, as explained by Gregory (2009) community currencies such as Time Banks operate with different values systems and practices which can be difficult for people to grasp. Thus, in order to expand and diversify their membership (Collom, 2007), Time Banks need to understand what obstacles people face in utilising Time Banking. Thus, this paper attempts to fill these gaps by presenting findings from a study of a Time Bank in an affluent community in the first Time Bank in New Zealand.

Thus the purpose of this paper is to explore the potential benefits and obstacles to Time Banking among a relatively affluent population of users. The presentation in this paper is as follows: First, the literature review will introduce the concepts of community currency and Time Banks. Next, the literature on Time Banking will be thoroughly covered. The concept of capital and the various forms of capital will be discussed. Next, the methods section will be presented followed by the results section.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Community Currency**

Community currency as defined by Seyfang (2004b) is an alternative form of money used as a response to a failure in the functioning of conventional money that often has wider objectives than simple economic functions. In addition, Seyfang (2004a) states that this "failure could be due to a scarcity of the means of exchange, an economic failure, or the failure could be social, environmental or ethical (p. 58)." Two popular types of community currency are—Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) and Time Banks (van Kuik, 2009).

Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS) are a form of community currency most prominent across the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. LETS were developed in British Columbia, Canada in the 1980s as a means to bring together supply and demand when the conventional money was unavailable due to an economic recession (van Kuik, 2009). LETS

are barter systems to encourage people to exchange goods and services within their local communities, creating an alternative economy outside and parallel to the wider money economy (Caldwell, 2000). A LETS is a local membership organisation that produces a directory of the goods and services offered by its members, and uses a notional, virtual currency (e.g., shells, bunyas) to record the exchanges that take place (Krohn and Snyder, 2008). Unlike the national currency, credits do not have to be earned before they are spent and no interest is payable on either negative balances or savings (Caldwell, 2000). LETS are the most thoroughly studied community currency system (Caldwell, 2000; Cahn, 2000; Gran, 1998; Liesh and Birch, 2000; Seyfang, 2001a; Seyfang, 2001b; Williams, 1996).

Time Banks are a relatively newer but thriving form of community currency (Collom, 2005; North, 2003; Seyfang, 2002). A Time Bank is a form of community currency that rewards informal volunteering by paying one 'hour' for each hour of commitment, which can at any time be 'cashed in' by requesting an hour of work in return from the system (Williams, 2004). In most Time Banks, a broker is employed to manage the scheme, maintain a database of participants, and recruit people and organisations (Seyfang, 2004a), and a system is developed to record, store, and reward transactions when neighbours help neighbours (Williams, 2004).

Given that Time Banks evolved out of Edgar Cahn's (2000) struggle to increase the effectiveness of social programmes, it is not surprising that most Time Banks are based in organisations (such as hospitals, schools, churches, or social service agencies) and target the socially marginalised (Collom, 2007) with co-production as an objective. However, according to Gregory (2009), the use of Time Banks need not solely be to develop co-production; other goals such as achieving an active citizenship or reciprocal volunteering (Seyfang, 2004b) may be equally possible.

The main difference between LETS and Time Banks is that LETS stress the economic exchanges whereas Time Banks stress the social exchanges (Seyfang, 2004a). LETS currency may reflect national price valuations or may be locally negotiated. Time Banks are based on the assumption that everyone's labour is of equal value so, regardless of the work involved, an hour of work is worth one time credit. Moreover, LETS exchanges rely upon members contacting each other directly via a database, while Time Banks create a facilitated exchange where the Time Bank broker initially matches requests for help with offers (Seyfang, 2003).

Time Banks operate to facilitate exchanges that honour five core values (Cahn, 2004; Timebanks USA, 2010; Reily and Cassidy, 2008):

- We are all assets – every human being has something to contribute;
- Redefining work – rewarding the real work in our society by creating a currency which pays people for helping each other and creating better places to live;
- Reciprocity – giving and receiving are basic human needs which help to build relationships and trust with others;
- Social Networks – building people's social capital is very important, belonging to a social network gives our lives more meaning; and
- Respect- encouraging people to respect others in their community.

### **Time Banking**

Research or evaluation studies into Time Banking is fairly limited. There are however some studies that shed light on the nature of participation in and benefits of Time Banking. For instance, Boyle et al. (2006) suggest that co-production projects, such as Time Banks, can

help participants to extend their social networks and friendships and the range of opportunities available to them. They also found that Time Banks are an effective way of developing reciprocal relationships between users. In a study in the United Kingdom in the health services area, it was found that when Time Banks were incorporated into health provisions there were tangible benefits, both practical and motivational, to health services users (Simon, 2003). Seyfang and Smith (2002) found that Time Banks were successfully attracting participants from socially excluded groups and in attracting people who would not normally get involved in traditional volunteering. They also found that participation was felt to improve people's life by increasing social interaction.

In a study of Time Bank brokers in the UK, Seyfang (2001) found that participants exchange time at least once or twice a month and the most commonly exchanged services included gardening, giving lifts, befriending, visiting the housebound, DIY jobs, dog walking, and computer training. Time Bank brokers stated they were targeting socially excluded groups of people to join.

In addition, Seyfang (2003) conducted an in-depth investigation of a Time Bank in an impoverished community in the U.K. Using a mixed method approach, she found that Time Bank participants join to help others, become more involved in the local community, improve the neighbourhood, get help for oneself, and meet people. Two-thirds of the participants felt that the Time Bank had helped them to achieve their objectives. However, only around a third of participants reported successfully receiving services as a 'skills gap' prevented needed exchanges, yet participants still valued the social support of the Time Bank (Seyfang, 2003).

In perhaps the most comprehensive study, Collom (2007) surveyed participants in a US Time Bank to determine their motivations, engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes of participation. The participants who joined this Time Bank were largely female and white, highly educated (although average household incomes were low since one-quarter of members were unemployed). The most important reason for joining Time Banks was to expand purchasing power through an alternative currency. The values that the Time Bank supports were cited as the next most important reason for joining. Participants most valued their ability to help other people. Although participants were highly motivated to join for needs-based reasons, participants did not feel their needs were being sufficiently met by the Time Bank, similar to the findings of Seyfang (2003). Participants, however, still reported high levels of satisfaction and engagement with the Time Bank.

Seyfang (2004a) in a case study with an inner city Time Bank in Scotland, found a number of internal obstacles faced by this organisation. Most importantly, a psychological barrier exists that makes it difficult for participants to understand the difference between Time Banking and traditional volunteering. In addition, participants in this Time Bank enjoy giving of their time, but find it difficult to ask for time in return. This study also found that a skills gap prevents some participants from spending their time credits. Finally, participants who were not in regular contact had the tendency to disengage with the organisation.

Research also suggests that there are a number of key characteristics to make Time Bank projects successful (Boyle et. al, 2006). These include: projects need to retain their informal approach; they need to provide opportunities for personal growth and development; they need to develop the emotional intelligence of people; use peer support networks; devolve real responsibility and offer participants a range of incentives.

Although growing in popularity, Time Banks are relatively under researched (Collom, 2007; Seyfang, 2004b). In addition, all of the Time Bank research to date is based on surveys of Time Bank co-ordinators or has examined Time Bank participants in socially excluded groups (Seyfang, 2003) or low income communities (Collom, 2007). However, in order to diversify their membership (Collom, 2007), Time Banks need to understand why those from other groups participate.

### **Forms of Capital**

This paper uses the concept of capital to explore the benefits provided to participants of the Lyttelton Time Bank. Capital is defined as “accumulated labor which, when appropriated on a private basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (Bourdieu, 1986 p. 241). The concept of capital has been useful in enabling researchers to explore the operation of both economic and symbolic wealth in society (Murdock, 2000). Bourdieu was one of the first to propose different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) initially suggested three types of capital – economic, cultural and social capital; however, he later added symbolic capital to his conceptualisation of possible forms of capital (Huppatz, 2009). Other researchers have expanded on Bourdieu’s subtypes of capital to include emotional capital (Reay, 2004), physical capital (Shilling, 1991), gender capital (McCall, 1992), and feminine capital (Huppatz, 2009). Beyond the differentiation of possible forms of capital, researchers have used the concept to determine how organisations mobilise social capital in the relations between firms (Baker, 1990), how social capital is used in the creation of human capital (Coleman, 1988), whether social capital has been lost in society (Putnam, 1995; Bell, 2009), to determine how parents use cultural and social capital to advocate for their children with disabilities (Trainor, 2010), among a host of other applications.

In order to determine how Time Banking may benefit individual participants, this research attempts to assess the impact on individual human, physical, social and cultural capital. Gaskin (2008) defines physical capital as the concrete product or output gained by a recipient. Thus, physical capital would include the skills and services individuals bring and offer to others through the Time Bank. Coleman (1988) explains that human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways. Human capital is less tangible than physical capital in that it is embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual. As explained by Bell (2009), social capital is a concept that has been poorly defined in much of the literature. For the purposes of this paper, we utilise the definition provided by Putnam (1995) who defines social capital as “the features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (p. 67).” Thus, social capital would include the building of connections and networks among people and increased community awareness and trust (Bell, 2009; Gaskin, 2008). Gaskin (2008) suggests that cultural capital is a loosely defined benefit that was difficult to apply in their work on volunteers in sport. However, they define cultural capital as a shared sense of cultural and religious identity, reinforcement of ethnic or faith identity and inter-cultural understanding.

Although previous literature suggests that involvement with Time Banking can improve people’s quality of life through expanding social networks and increasing social interaction (Seyfang, 2004a), more work is required to evaluate whether and in what way involvement with Time Banking can benefit individuals. In addition, by exploring Time Banking in a relatively affluent area this research attempts to understand why those from other groups participate. Finally, this research explores what obstacles inhibit full use of Time Banking.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper reports the first stage of a two-stage project conducted with participants in the Lyttelton Time Bank. The methodology follows the work of Reilly and Cassidy (2008), which utilises focus group discussions with participants and reports the findings in terms of five types of capital – economic, physical, human, social and cultural. However, we do not incorporate economic capital as one of the benefits, as measuring the monetary value of Time Bank trades was not a goal of the Lyttelton Time Bank or this study. In addition, this study extends the work of Reilly and Cassidy (2008) by identifying obstacles to Time Banking.

First, three focus groups were held, which included five participants each who represented members with varying levels of experience with the local Time Bank. The focus groups were open-ended and guided by an interview protocol that explored such broad topics as what attracted participants to join the Time Bank, how Time Bank participation has affected their life, and how has the Time Bank experience enriched their life. Each participant was encouraged to respond to each question and participants were forthcoming in sharing their experiences. The focus groups ranged from 120-150 minutes and were audio-taped and transcribed. A hermeneutical analysis of the data was conducted to first identify broad emergent themes (Thompson, 1997) and then categorise the themes into benefits or obstacles. The second stage of the research is ongoing and involves interviews with Time Bank members and participant observation to explore these emergent themes in greater depth.

### **Research Setting**

In 2005 the first Time Bank in New Zealand was begun under the guidance of a grassroots community group in Lyttelton. During the first year of operation, the Time Bank struggled and with no trading co-ordinator only achieved 58 hours traded. Since that time the Time Bank has grown to include almost 250 individual members, which represents approximately 13% of the households in this community, and 12 organisational members. The Time Bank has facilitated a total of 16,054 trading hours, since its inception, with a current average of 444 hours per month and an average of 20 people trading each month. In addition, the Time Bank has had a paid trading co-ordinator on staff since 2006.

The Time Bank states its goals as: to strengthen the community; to facilitate neighbours meeting neighbours; to encourage residents to feel confident helping each other; to grow awareness that we are a community growing strong together; and to develop a complementary currency to foster sustainable development in the community (Project Lyttelton, 2009). Thus, co-production is not a stated goal of this Time Bank.

Lyttelton is geographically separate from a large city on the South Island of New Zealand. According to the 2006 New Zealand Census there are 3,075 residents in Lyttelton with 1350 households. In Lyttelton, 53.2% of people aged 15 years and over have a post-school qualification, compared with 38.5% of people in the wider Canterbury region. In addition, only 18% have no formal qualification as compared to 25.7% for the region. The median income for people aged 15 years and over is \$28,400 for Lyttelton as compared to \$23,500 for the region. Also, 23.6% have an annual income of more than \$50,000 as compared to only 15.8% for the region. Finally, 65.9% of individuals in private occupied dwellings own the dwelling as compared to 59.8% for the region (New Zealand Census, 2006). Thus, the research findings in this study would differ from previous studies (Gregory, 2009; Seyfang, 2002; 2003, 2004a; Seyfang and Smith 2002; Williams, 2000) in that the Time Bank is located in a relatively affluent area.

## **RESULTS**

The results section reports the findings of the research categorised into four types of capital – physical, human, social and cultural.

### **Physical Capital**

As the Lyttelton Time Bank has increased in membership there has obviously been an increase in the pool of skills available to members and it has also increased the activities (e.g., working bees, video nights) offered to members. The specific services participants report receiving through Time Bank trades include gardening, computer training and advice, working bees in individual's homes and gardens, assistance with shifting into or from homes, child minding, access to a trailer, and help around the home. Several participants, a young widow and a new member of the community, needed practical help in maintaining and setting up their properties, and they reported that the Time Bank had been invaluable in providing these services to them.

"I've always been very busy, and then my husband died, and I thought, I'm gonna join the Time Bank because I need to know how to do things. I needed help with, how do you prune an apricot tree? I had no idea but someone in the Time Bank did and they came to my rescue."

"There was a working bee in my garden, so people came and helped me with the windows and things that, you know, during that time I couldn't physically manage."

"The day I was shifting, people just turned up, people I did not know. The Time Bank had arranged for a trailer and extra people to come round!"

During the second focus group, all participants indicated that they appreciated the role of the Co-ordinator in facilitating the exchange of skills. In particular, the weekly email announcements that had been developed to alert members of offers and requests for services were highly valued, and members appreciated the informal, neighbourly nature of these communications. In addition, the social events offered by the Lyttelton Time Bank were enthusiastically viewed as a means of enhancing social relations among Time Bank members.

Finally, participants reported that the training sessions (e.g. book reading sessions, video night), that have been offered by the Lyttelton Time Bank, in order to develop particular community or individual skills, had been particularly useful. Participants also indicated that they appreciated getting, and getting rid of goods through the "freecycle" service and the trading swap.

"I think what I was thinking of was the pot luck dinner where we had the film, "The Story of Stuff" and we had the trading swap, and I thought it was a nice community gathering around a topic. I loved the topic and then watching the film together and having a conversation about it."

"We got donations of furniture and just stuff towards the house."

Participants reported that they were more likely to accrue time credits than to claim them back, and often struggled to ask for services back from other members. Some participants

indicated that they were happy to give of their time and services but did not feel that they needed anything done for them personally. This issue will be discussed later in the paper. Individuals in some instances, as reported by the Lyttelton Time Bank Co-ordinator, donated their time credits to the Community Treasure Chest, which meant that the credits could be used to organise Time Bank events, or put into a central pool for those who needed them.

### **Human Capital**

Almost all of the participants indicated that Time Banking gave them a sense of achieving something useful. This could be a sense of achieving things that they had always wanted to, the positive feeling of having helped someone else, or the realisation that they have something to offer.

“Being out in the garden, and helping with peoples’ garden has increased my sense of well being.”

“I needed to add something and there were things I could do for other people, and the Time Bank allowed me to feel needed and useful. I feel more grounded and confident.”

“I needed to help you and it was good for me.”

The Time Bank has helped the participants, in some cases, recognise their skills and realise that what they have to offer is of value.

“Being in the Time Bank has enriched me in feeling that what I have to offer is as worthwhile as anybody else’s.”

“I have skills that people want.”

“That what I have to offer in the way of theory and thinking was as good as anyone else.”

For some of the older and other potentially vulnerable members of the community, the Time Bank has given them a sense of confidence that they can live independently and safely in the community.

“The Time Bank has given me a feeling of security that I can live independently in my old age and in my own home, things that I can’t do physically I can get help with.”

“Being on my own, it’s the security thing of having someone else to call on if I need things, it’s a comfort.”

“I have felt supported and not on my own.”

This sense of security has been accompanied by a feeling that they now have more of the skills they need to ask people for things. Although several of the participants struggle with asking for help; this will be discussed later in the paper.



“It is very difficult to ask for favours at some level, so with this I can ask for , I can ask to have something done for me.”

“I’m not a single unit now, that I can help people in that family (the Time Bank) and that I can ask for help too.”

Finally, for some the Time Bank has given them feelings of hope in belonging to something.

“The Time Bank has increased my sense of well being because I feel I belong to a community.”

“The working bee at my place, being part of it and helping out, that sense of community afterwards, feeling part of that has been great and I want more.”

### **Social Capital**

The majority of participants indicated that what attracted them to the Time Bank was the community nature of the project.

“I’m relatively new to Lyttelton and just to get to know neighbours was the main issue really (that attracted him to the Time Bank).”

Across the focus groups there was a view that the Time Bank increased individuals’ sense of being part of the community. This was particularly valuable for people who were new to the area or lived alone. Immigrants from other cultures often have cross cultural challenges as they seek to belong in their new homeland. Two of the participants, an American woman and a German man, reported that the Time Bank was very helpful in help them to build relationships.

“I didn’t know many people in this community – the Time Bank provided an easy transition into the community.”

In addition to feeling more part of the community, some Time Bank members expressed that they were now more willing to get involved in local activities.

“The Time Bank gives you information about the community, what is going on.”

“I live in Cass Bay, not Lyttelton, and even so I’m still just going back and forth but through the Time Bank I find that, I feel that its closer, because of the things that I’m hearing and getting the weekly little update.”

The Time Bank was also viewed by participants as a route to social contact for participants. Having people to talk to locally was viewed to be important as it gave a sense of community. One older participant who indicated a tendency to isolate himself reported that the Time Bank enabled him to become more connected to the community:

“Suddenly you need people and I think that is important, and you know there are people out there and you can ring them up and say giddyay. You are not alone. It is not just about getting jobs done, while you are working you can be socialising.”

Participants also felt safer in their communities as a result of knowing people and they also felt their children were safer. Several of the participants also reported that they had more trust in other people.

“Just walking down the street and people saying hello to you, not many places that you get that anymore. You actually know who your neighbours are and you would feel comfortable knocking on their doors and I would be comfortable letting my children walk to the shops, the community sort of helps to look out for them and us.”

“I feel more trusting towards the community. I feel this is a great place to live.”

“I don’t feel so isolated. I’m not a single unit now. I feel safer.”

“I feel comfortable talking to strangers, helping strangers.”

It was also expressed that the Time Bank was a good means for meeting new people and people one would not otherwise socialise with. What is referred to in the literature as bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), or encouraging positive interactions between different generations and groups within the community (James, 2005), or reinforcing weak ties within the community.

“I have met and socialised with people I otherwise would not have. People of all ages and different interests. Time Bank was broadened my connections to a wide range of people.”

“Before I tended to just belong to things were people had the same interests I had and were the same age group, however, with a Time Bank event there are children and grannies. Suddenly I’ve got all these new friends of all ages.”

### **Cultural Capital**

The focus group questions did not specifically ask whether the Time Bank represented the wider community. However, there was definite recognition that the Lyttelton Time Bank was very open and friendly and that all members were welcomed and valued.

“I have lived in economies where one of my services is worth three of your services. It is calculated on people’s worth. But with Time Bank it is an hour for an hour. There isn’t an equation of the worth of your services versus the worth of my services.”

### **Obstacles to Time Banking**

While these benefits are significant, an obstacle exists as the participants in the Time Bank often struggled to move from the rational efficiency motive that drives marketplace exchanges to develop new discourses, rules, and practices to define Time Bank exchanges (Kozinets, 2002). As explained by Gregory (2009), community currencies such as Time Banks operate with different value systems and practices which can be difficult for people to grasp at first. Amy recalls her initial experiences with the Time Bank when she relied on her experiences with market-based exchanges, which are discrete transactions in which items of equal value are exchanged directly (Dwyer et al., 1987):

“When I first joined the Time Bank, I was very conscious that I couldn’t spend any time dollars until I had them. You know, you don’t spend money that you haven’t got. I can’t accept help, even though I needed help, without paying for it. I had to pay the bank back. I couldn’t go into debt. How can I ask anyone to help me when I haven’t done anything for anyone else yet?”

Here, Amy clearly did not understand that the Time Bank is a system that allows one to “go into debt” by promising to provide time and energy to the community at a later time. Moreover, this is an exchange that is egalitarian and assumes that each person’s labour is equally valued, which runs counter to a marketplace in which labour is differentially valued.

Instead, the Time Bank is based on norms of reciprocity and trust. As George explains, “being a Time Bank member is not just every now and then going to working bees, but also changing your way of thinking, all of a sudden you have a different approach on this to life. How could I make use of the Time Bank not just giving my work, but also asking for help?” Similar to previous research (Collom, 2007; Seyfang, 2004a), George is motivated to participate by altruistic reasons yet has considerable more difficulty asking for help. While participants frequently were comfortable donating time to the bank, they struggled with the discomfort of asking for help, which is so often socially constructed as indebtedness or vulnerability. As expressed by Tracy, “I like the fact that if somebody needs help, they can get it. Love that. Ahh and if I can help, that’s great I’m only too happy to, I just haven’t needed it yet.”

Ironically, the full benefits of the Time Bank exchange may not be experienced if people do not both give and receive. Although Amy initially struggled with utilising the Time Bank, she appears to use the Time Bank more than any of the other participants, and she also appears to have made the biggest leap in terms of the way she conceptualises the nature of sharing time. For instance, Amy says “I don’t feel so isolated; I’m not a single unit now. I do feel more that I am part of a large extended family that I can help people in that family and that I can ask for help. I have skills that people want. They have skills that I need.” Like Kozinets’ (2002) “hypercommunity,” some Time Bank members have begun to create a caring and sharing community from which they can draw for support. Amy has also come to recognise that her skills have value in that community.

As was found in the research of Reilly and Cassidy (2008), several of the participants struggle to utilise the Time Bank more as they are unable to suggest skills that they have to offer. As expressed by Amy,

“I think that, also women think, that ‘oh, I don’t have any skills.’ I do a lot of publishing for friends, I didn’t think of that as a skill because I’m not clever or I’m not computer savvy that just seems to be something I can do I’m good at. I’ve done marketing courses because I had my own business, but I never thought of putting that out there because I’m not a professional.”

Samantha also struggles with recognising what skills she has to offer the community, “I haven’t figured out how to put something out there that seems to be being drawn upon in the community, other than my arms and hands.”

Most of the participants struggle with how to use the Time Bank more. As expressed by Nicole, “It has helped me when I’ve used it, but I think I could use it more still. I have this

big load on my shoulders and I forget that there is another way of dealing with it.” Part of the change in thinking that seems to enable participants to use the Time Bank more, is to recognise that the transaction or exchange is quite different from a market based exchange rather it is an exchange that helps to foster close relationships, based on trust and goodwill (Liesch and Birch, 2000). For instance, George explains,

It’s not only you go to another Time Bank member and you do your job and say see you later. Afterwards you have a cup of tea or just by doing some socialising. It’s not just doing jobs and getting jobs done but it’s also about exchanging other experiences and learning other things too. Just through that you get other contacts and learn about other things.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has described the findings of a qualitative study of Time Bank members from the first Time Bank in New Zealand. Unlike previous research, this study has explored Time Banking among a relatively affluent population. However, like previous research the results reveal a tremendous number of benefits in the form of physical, human, social and cultural capital.

In terms of physical capital these results are similar to the work of Seyfang (2001) in terms of the services members give and receive in the Time Bank. In addition, the Time Bank in this study serves as an affirming institution which enables participants to recognise their skills and capabilities and gain new skills, or increase their human capital (Seyfang, 2004b). There is some evidence in this study that the Time Bank facilitates cultural capital; however, similar to the work of Gaskin (2009) this benefit was not readily apparent. This may primarily be due to the nature of the questions asked during the focus groups, which did not specifically address cultural capital, thus suggesting a need for further research in this area. Finally, there is a great deal of evidence in this research that Time Banking serves to build connections and increase trust among members, their social capital, similar to the findings of Boyle et al., (2006) and Seyfang and Smith (2002), and reinforce weak ties in the community (Seyfang, 2004b). Thus, based on these findings it may be possible to extend Time Banking to other communities.

However, this study also identifies a number of obstacles which may constrain the full development of Time Banking. As found by Seyfang (2004a) a psychological barrier exists which makes it difficult for members to grasp the nature of Time Bank exchanges. Similar to previous research (Collom, 2007; Seyfang, 2004a) participants are motivated to participate by altruistic reasons yet have a much harder time asking for help in return. In addition, many of Time Bank participants in this study want to use the Time Bank more but struggle with recognising what skills they have to offer and in recognising that their skills have value.

In terms of practical recommendations, the Lyttelton Time Bank is obviously doing a number of things well as evidenced by the increasing membership numbers as well as the increase in hours traded. In particular, as suggested by the recommendations of Boyle et al. (2006), the informal approach that has been taken by the Time Bank Co-ordinator in both her interactions with members and the weekly emails to members is appreciated by participants. The Lyttelton Time Bank has provided many opportunities for personal growth and development of its members including video discussions, book discussions, stuff swap, etc. It has begun to provide peer support networks through social evenings and a child minding club. Finally, it has begun to devolve responsibility to members as weekly emails alert members of requests

for help and offers of assistance. These emails also encourage members to visit the website and coordinate exchanges themselves, without the help of the Co-ordinator. The Lyttelton Time Bank has also begun regular communication with other New Zealand Time Banks, as they launch; this has been an effective method to share not only ideas and new initiatives but also resources.

The research findings however suggest a number of practical issues that may need to be addressed to facilitate a higher level of trading among Time Bank members. First, although the data only partially supports this recommendation, there are quite a few new members, who may not understand the mechanism around making a trade. A basic training session, or even an email detailing the mechanics around trading, may be helpful to both old and new members.

This basic training session could be combined with a session that would help members reframe or change their discourse on the nature of Time Bank exchanges. There seems to be two related issues in this area. First, participants seem willing to give of their time, but struggle with asking for time or help in return. Thus, Time Bank participants may need assistance in helping to frame their notions of value. For those who do not ask for help, helping them to recognise that by asking for help, you help someone else see that their labour is valued and of value. To fail to ask for help, is to fail to acknowledge the value of other's labour in the community. In addition, members may need to be assured that asking for help is not a sign of vulnerability but a normal part of being human.

Second, participants struggle with the notion that they can use time credits before they have earned them, in other words they can go into debt. Members may need more explanation on the concept of reciprocity, that giving and receiving are basic human needs which help to build relationships and trust with others. The Time Bank system allows one to go into "debt," and that "debt" is simply a promise on their part to put energy into the community at a later date. Some members who particularly struggle with this notion may simply need to be given credits from the community chest to allow them to begin trading.

Other participants struggled with recognising that their skills have value. A session that illustrates common trades in the Lyttelton Time Bank, might enable those members who are not aware of their skills (e.g., cooking, sewing, babysitting, companionship), to recognise that their labour has value. In addition, more peer support networks (Boyle et al., 2006), such as the child minding club, may enable members to change their views about their own skills as they have direct and indirect contact with other members and hear about successful Time Bank trades. More social events may also be beneficial in this area by enabling Time Bank members to talk about past trades.

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